

Homemaker Wins Ticket After Ten Years of Effort

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Of The Journal Staff

WHEN Mary Meyer calls CQ these days there is more than a faint note of triumph in her voice, a triumph that is shared by dozens of her radio friends in many states. She got her ham radio license three weeks ago, you see, after 10 years of effort. That is her "ticket" to the airwaves. Now she is W9RUJ. And she can sit at her microphone in the basement, or clutch her hand mike as she drives about in her car, and talk endlessly to radio hams in many states. A comradely bunch, they rejoice with her.

This week end when she is chairman of the women radio amateurs convention, she will entertain 55 of her friends. All of them long since know the good news, which travels fast by air. And many of them who are still unlicensed, will, she hopes, be encouraged by her example.

Gray haired and grandmotherly, Mrs. Henry G. Meyer, Patricia lane, town of Brookfield, is one of few women radio hams whose interest is independent of her husband's. He is not a ham operator, and quite frankly views the goings on in the basement with indifference.

"He thinks we're crazy," says Mary confidentially, "but he doesn't really mind."

Enjoys Pole Cat Club

Henry was away on a business trip and was unavailable for comment, but there in the basement was proof that he did not really object to his wife's hobby. It was a brand new transmitter, a Mother's day gift.

Here Mary Meyer sits at the microphone early in the morning or late at night, and never keeps track of the time. One definite appointment is with the Pole Cat club, which meets via the airwaves at 11 a.m. every day. The chairman calls the roll from Green Lake, Wis., and 29 radio hams report their presence. Edward Giese, Palmyra, Wis., is the originator of the Pole Cat club

and "chief contaminator of the airwaves every noon hour."

And here is a kind of comradeship, evidently, which women rarely find time for in lives which are busy with their own families. Mary's good friend, Mrs. George Toppe, a former Milwaukeean who lives with her husband, another ham, at Barrington, Ill., is a week end guest. It was she who encouraged Mary to keep trying during the long years when she thought she never would be able to pass the license test.

"I told her never to give it up," Jackie Toppe says proudly, "and she never did."

She Serves as Example

There is a teacher at Rufus King high school who uses me for an example when he teaches his radio group," Mary Meyer says cheerfully. "I'd hate to say how many times I took that test and failed."

Long before she began taking the test, however, Mary Meyer was an ardent short wave listener. It all began when the Meyers acquired a radio with a short wave band and she began to listen to the hams. That was 18 years ago.

One of the first, and friendliest, voices she heard was that of Jackie Toppe, the first licensed woman radio ham in Milwaukee. Mary called her up one day and said she would like to stop in for a visit. Jackie was delighted to find another convert to her radio hobby.

"So I went one day at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and stayed that night until midnight."

Eight years later she began to try for a license. But it had been a long time since she had set herself the task of learning anything new, apart from new recipes, at any rate, and radio did not come easily to the middle aged homemaker.

Builds Speed in Year

Finally the rules were modified, and it became possible to get a novice's license by passing a Morse code test at the rate of five words a minute, plus a relatively simple written test on theory. For a year Mary Meyer held the novice rating, established more than 1,000 cw contacts with her keys, one in at the basement set and another in her car, where she used to hold the key on her knee as she drove. Gradually she built up her speed to the point of 31 words a minute.

"Then I stopped trying to memorize the theory and started trying to understand it," Mary recalls, "and I began to make some progress."

Many radio friends hoped and prayed and struggled along with her, and there was quite a celebration the night the good news came that Mary had at last qualified for her "ticket." Jackie and her husband came from Barrington, and several hams from the neighborhood gathered at the Meyers.

One of them thrust a catalog under her husband's nose.

"Now you've got to get Mary this transmitter," they insisted, "even if you have to sell the two cars and your golf clubs."

And he, who had been known to snore through ham broadcasts at the Toppe's house, could not but agree.

Now Mary talks to a wide circle of radio friends, some of whom she has never met, although all of them are on a first name basis. One is Mrs. Verona Thackeray, Albuquerque, N. M., W5ZUD. Another is Mrs. Helen McKreal, West Palm Beach, Fla., who is flying up for the week end.

She has a W.A.B. certificate from a minister and his wife, the Rev. and Mrs. Everett L. Batten, Glenwood, Elgin, Ill., signifying that she has "worked all Batters," and another from a doctor and his wife and their two children at Sycamore, Ill.

Meets "Ossified Zebra"

There are frequent chats with a Maryknoll nun, Sister Charlotte, who teaches at St. Theresa's academy, Boise, Idaho, and with a Ardmore, Pa., man who calls himself "elegantly ossified zebra," W3EOZ, who happens to be head of the company which makes Mary's transmitter.

Another good friend via radio is a St. Paul (Minn.) nurse, Mrs. Lydia Johnson, who was to get off night duty in time to fly for



After 10 years of trying, Mrs. Henry G. Meyer, Patricia lane, town of Brookfield, has succeeded in winning her amateur radio operator's license. She took the tests many times before she passed. Her good friend, Mrs.

George Toppe, a former Milwaukeean, now of Barrington, Ill., encouraged her to keep at it. Mary Meyer is chairman of the women radio amateur's convention in Milwaukee this week end.

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another who has promised a visit to Robert "Uncle John" (Mary's call letters are W9RUJ) is the Rev. John Haas, WRUJF, rector of the Queen of the Apostles seminary at Madison, Wis.

Radio hams, women as well as men, live in a world of their own, clearly, and it is a close knit and friendly one. Mary for instance believes that if everyone were a radio ham, there would be no more wars. All radio hams everywhere become good friends, call each other by their first names, "chew the rag" (there is a Rag Chewers' club) endlessly, do many valuable favors for people they probably never will see.

Mary continues to send and receive the Morse code, as well as talking and listening to other hams. Many times the code gets through when a voice does not, she has learned. She has achieved her great ambition, true, but that does not mean there are no more worlds to conquer.

More Ambitions Remain

Now she hopes to W.A.S. ("work all states") and also to make contact with her son, Jerry, 24, stationed with the air force at El Paso, Tex. He shows no inclination to be a radio ham any more than her husband does, but Mary does not mind. She is radio ham enough for the whole family.

Although there are, among Milwaukee's 11 licensed women radio amateurs, those who have made more contacts, none has more enthusiasm for the solitary hobby, at once the loneliest and friendliest of all. It is nothing to sit up until 2 a.m., trying to make a contact for one stranger or another, but the result, when it comes, is worth the weary hours.

"These are the happiest days of my life," she told her electrician, another radio ham. They had met by radio first, and when he came to the door, his first words were:

"Are you RUJ? I am SYV from Pewaukee."

"Come in," she said.

"I have the XYL in the car," he said.

"Bring her in," she returned.

And that was the beginning of another radio friendship. Life is full of them for Mary now, and she plans to renew 55 such contacts over the week end, when the women radio hams have their convention. She is the chairman, and plans to entertain them at her house Saturday night.